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Will Reagan invade Nicaragua?

The disruption of the White House's secret financial pipeline to the Contras combined with Reagan's deep political problems raises the spectre that Nicaragua may face a full-scale invasion by this country.

The reason for this, simply, is that Reagan needs a victory. And, under the right circumstances, Nicaragua could give him that victory.

The administration is hard at work setting up these circumstances. It is planning major National Guard and Reserve training exercises in Honduras next year and, with the help of the Congress, has struck a legislative blow against attempts by some governors to prevent this (See Weather Report). This legislation is critical, because if the US were to invade Nicaragua, it might take as many as 100,000 troops and given the presence reliance on the Guard and Reserves, it is essential that these forces be quickly available.

Even though Congress has barred military personnel from aiding the Contras within 20 miles of the Nicaraguan border, Pentagon officials admitted to the Washington Post that a Florida National Guard unit of about 100 men is operating 18 miles from the border, in an area about 25 miles from where the Nicaraguans and the Contras were engaged in combat. The Pentagon calls this a "very routine training deployment." On December 3, Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega charged that American forces had moved within nine miles and were threatening a "direct confrontation." On December 8, as we were going to press, American newspapers reported that US helicopters manned by American crews were transporting Honduran ground troops to within 15 miles of the Nicaraguan border.

Even without this Reagan administration game of chicken and the possible dire consequences that could come of it, there are other ways to set up an excuse for a fullscale invasion. For example, PNS's Roger Burbach reported this month from Managua:

"A likely scenario would involve getting either Honduran or Costa Rican forces to attack Sandinista units in the border areas. The United States has already been pressuring the Honduran military to deploy large numbers of troops in the border area where the Contras and the Sandinistas have been fighting. Thus far, the Honduran army has refused to accede. (This was written before the helicopter operation).

"Clashes between Honduran or even Costa Rican forces and the Sandinistas could be used to justify US air strikes against Nicaraguan military and economic targets, and would almost surely evoke a Nicarguan

"Clashes between Honduran or even Costa Rican forces and the Sandinistas could be used to justify US air strikes against Nicaraguan military and economic targets, and would almost surely evoke a Nicaraguan response. High ranking Nicaraguan officials have already proclaimed that the "Sandinista army has the capacity to fight anywhere in Central America," implying that US bases and soldiers in Honduras and El Salvador are not safe from attack.

"This situation could obviously escalate into a full scale war between Nicaragua and the United States.

"The US ambassador in Managua, Harry Bergold, recently said that once the Reagan administration determines 'a threshhold has been crossed, there would be a massive invasion by US forces. Tens of thousands of American soldiers would be sent in, massive US firepower would be used, and a naval blockade would be set up to ensure that not one bullet got through to the Sandinistas.'

"The ambassador went on to declare that this is 'the only invasion plan in Washington. There will be no half-way measures. The administration wants to deploy maximum firepower to win the war quickly.'"

Some military estimates are that it would take about a year to take over Nicaragua, which means that an operation begun within the next six months or so could theoretically be over in time for the 1988 elections. On the other hand, the military has not noticably improved its estimating ability since Vietnam.

• Earth Island Journal reports that Alaska's Russell Fjord has been destroyed by an a glacier advancing at the the rate of 130 feet per day. It blocked the fjord, causing the trapped water to rise more than 30 feet above sea level, flooding an area of 75 square miles and creating a lake that may eventually reach 110 square miles. A US Geological Survey glaciologist has called it "probably the largest natural alteration in ocean, glaciers, lakes and rivers to occur in North America within our lifetimes."

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America's hidden homeless

DAVID BEERS

For most Americans the classic symbol of homelessness is a ragged figure huddled over a steam grate, city crowds flowing by. But other images are beginning to surface that could swell the nation's homeless tally by uncounted thousands.

Rural social service workers are reporting a growing wave of homelessness in the countryside—undocumented farm workers sleeping under bridges in California's wine valeys, dirt poor families living in shacks and under tarps in Appalachia, mentally ill and Vietnam vets roaming remote areas of the northwest.

In California's forest and farm blanketed Del Norte County, just below the Oregon border, the 500 beds of the non-profit Rural Human Services shelter are always full now, and the waiting lists long. Director Paul Nankung says residents numbered 5,000 last year — up from 115 six years ago — with a "a tremendous increase in homeless families."

Similar patterns are showing up in other California rural areas, according to an October survey by the Homeless Task Force of the state's County Supervisors Association. Officials in Mendocino County, for example, reported a doubling of the number of people needing food and shetler between 1980 and 1985.

In Ohio, migrant camps that were half occupied in previous years spilled over in recent months, leaving many farmworkers to live in cars or old barns, according to Lydia Alejandro of that state's Farm Worker Legal Services.

In the citrus groves around Chandler, Arizona, some 800 Mexican and Central American farm worker seekers "are living under bits of plastic," says Lupe Sanchez, director of the Arizona Farm Workers Union. Most won't find work, but more continue to arrive.

Even in the pastoral parts of Long Island, New York, numbers of people are homeless, acknowledges Nancy Travers, who tracks the issue for the entire state. But she, like other government officials around the country, hasn't even semi-solid figures to guage what she calls a "hidden" population.

"Rural homelessness has been ignored" nationally, says Mitch Snyder, of the DC-based Community for

Creative Non-Violence. Part of the reason is that rural folk in need of shleter are far harder to find and count. In such areas there are far fewer soup kitchens and other public facilities. Because housing standards tend to be more lax, persons can hole up in barely livable shacks and not be considered technically "homeless." Also, compared to overloaded city forces, small town police are more energetic about keeping the needy off their streets, thinks Heather Andrews, co-chair of the California Homeless Coalition.

A 1985 report by the Ohio Department of Mental Health found that "non-urban places are hostile to homeless outsiders," who therefore stay on the move until they reach a city. Rural "indigenous homeless," meanwhile, usually are cared for by friends and relations, "shuttling the person or family along... as their welcome is exhausted." Both patterns tend to mask true numbers.

Many rural homeless — especially undocumented immigrants — are invisible on purpose, and much less likely to approach authorities for help than city counterparts.

After comparing notes with fellow shelter workers, Paul Nankung is convinced that rural areas attract certain types of homeless persons these days. "We have a lot of mentally ill and also angry Vietnam vet types, who just want to get away from people" Others "think that moving to rural areas will solve their problems for them; they have the romantic notion that country people pull together.

Instead, says Nankung, they find "people are stressed-out here, too." Nationwide, rural unemployment generally runs higher than urban, and his area, with logging way down and a 20% to 30% winter jobless rate, is no exception.

In depressed counties of Appalachia, government cutbacks in housing aid have generated their own form of homelessness. For 50 years, the federal government has been the major source of housing assistance for low income people in the region, says David Lollis, director of the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises, a network of non-profit builders and financers based in Berea, Kentucky. But in the past five years that funding has

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been cut over 60%. In 1980, $393 million in federal funds subsidized rural rents; this year the figure will be zero.

The result, says Lollis, is "thousands of people who have put together some little piece of shelter, like the shantytowns in South Africa."

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Missing message

One message of the fall elections is that Democrats should start acting like Democrats again. Nowhere was this message clearer than in Barbara Mikulski's stunning victory in Maryland. Nonetheless, the media and the party leadership seem to have a bottomless capacity for missing messages and thus the conventional wisdom is that Mikulski won because her opponent, Linda Chavez, was such a poor candidate and ran such a dirty campaign. The problem with this analysis is that Mikulksi had Chavez on the ropes almost from the opening bell and the dirty campaign was more a sign of desperation than of strategy. As state Democratic party treasurer James Rosapepe pointed out, "Even a well-run Chavez campaign would have gotten clobbered." Further, Mikulski had earlier walked all over conventional liberal Mike Barnes in the Democratic primary despite copycat voting records in Congress.

Mikulski not only won big when many of the more favored names in the party were squeaking into the Senate, she is the first Democratic woman in history to win a seat without her husband being there first. Since the election, relatively little attention has been paid to the Mikulski win — reflecting the hardiness of conventional thinking in the party and the media.

Nonetheless, anyone seriously interested in discovering how the Democratic Party can continue its successes into 1988 could no little more useful than to examine the Mikulski story (along with the signs of a populist surge in farm states such as the Dakotas.

Here was a candidate with an 80% approval rating from the ADA who could draw support from the conservative Eastern Shore. A woman who was perhaps the least telegenic of the senatorial candidates for whom voters had a visceral appreciation and a deep trust. A candidate who held off both liberal and reactionary opponents not by hugging the political middle, but by convincing people that she would fight for their interests. A candidate who was a genuine street Democrat, who had a long history of support of the issues that concerned average people, rather than a corporate Democrat, of the sort with which the party is increasingly burdened, whose primary interest seems to be in seducing conservative special interests. Mikulski so defies today's standard political standards that the experts have apparently decided just to ignore her as a fluky benefiary of a badly run GOP campaign.

In doing so, they demonstrate what is most severely wrong with the Democratic Party. It is both afraid of its consituency and afraid to stand up for it.

There is more than a little evidence that this is a serious mistake. Earlier this year, Democratic pollster Vic Fingerhut took a survey that found, according to the Associated Press, "overhwelming support for candidates who stand up for the elderly, family farmers and working people." Seventy-seven percent of those surveyed favored a Democratic presidential candidate described as a "populist Democrat who's working to return the party to the tradition" of Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy. Only 21 percent favored a neo-Democrat who favors taking the party away from its traditional constituency.

And as Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers pointed out in "The Myth of America's Turn to the Right" in the Atlantic last spring, there is tremendous national support for New Deal type policies and strategies. Writing in a recent issue of the Nation, Ferguson says, "No matter how often the press asserts the contrary, Ronald Reagan has not been the most popular postwar president, the Reagan agenda commands little public support, the electorate remains deeply attached to the New Deal economic issues that Democrats have increasingly abandoned and, in short, the claims that the American public has shifted sharply to the right are manifestly false. The election results bear us out."

Ferguson went on to describe the current political system: "That system is not dominated by the Republicans in the way the Democrats are said to have dominated the New Deal era. Instead, two predominantly conservative parties battle each other over a narrow range of issues before an electorate that will almost certainly diminish with each stupefying and mendacious campaign."

The Democratic Party's victory in the Senate was almost in spite of itself. Faced with growing unease

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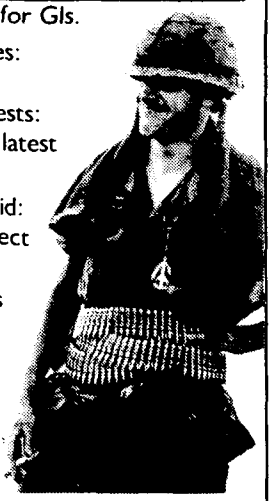

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about the Reagan agenda, the party responded with more obfuscation, more waffling, more deliberate fogging of the difference between opponents. Given the fact that it won the Senate, the party will undoubtedly take this as a sign that the right political consultant is worth more than the right policies. It will continue to make itself an indentured servant of the very corporate and financial interests that the voters would like to get off their backs. And it will, in all likelihood, continue to think that that rambunctious little woman only got into the Senate because her opponent got some bad advice. And with this thinking there is no way the Democrats can win the White House in 1988. It will be up to the Republicans, once again, to lose it.

Weather Report

National Guard buildup in Honduras. Last month we reported on the Reagan administration's use of National Guard troops to increase American military presence in Central America—a move opposed by a number of governors. Since then, Congress has put a further squeeze on the National Guard, adding an amendment to recent legislation that reasserts the federal government's right to order National Guard troops out of the country for exercises, despite the objections of the governors. Ony state emergencies such as floods and hurricanes can take precedence under the new law. This assault on states' rights was unanimously opposed by the National Governors Association, which backed gubentorial control over the state militias. The NGA, however, does not plan to sue over the matter unless the governors ask it to... Meanwhile, it is expected that some 4500 National Guard and Reserve troops will receive training in Honduras next year during an exercise called "Blazing Trails '87."

Peace Coalition seeks own $100 million: A coalition of peace groups says it has already raised nearly $12 million in a $100 million campaign to provide medical supplies and clothing for Nicaraguans. The program, called "Quest for Peace," is aimed at matching the federal budget (at least the above board budget) for support of the Contras. Groups involved in the effort include Pledge of Resistance, Witness for Peace, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, the US Peace Council, Sojourners, Communitas and the Maryknoll Missioners.

New homeless are women and families. Social service workers across the country are reporting that the newest crop of homeless are mainly women and families, many of whom led respectable lives before finding themselves searching for shelter. In interviews with the New York Times, advocates for the homeless variously describe the people out on the nation's strets as women whose unemployed husbands leave the family out of guilt and frustration; families who can no longer afford housing "because of high rents, lacks of jobs, divorces;" and the "middle class suddenly poor" who "lose their jobs, their credit cards and their mortgage... " Meanwhile, cities are bracing for a record number of poor in need of shelter this winter. An Atlanta group estimates that city has 5000 homeless people but room for only 1800. San Diego County also estimates that it has 5000 homeless people at any one time, while Kansas City has between 7000 and 12000. Philadelphia has about 13,000, more than four times the number five years ago; and Los Angeles is estimated to have 40,000, a number equal to the population of Atlantic City.

Is nuclear war inevitable?: Parade magazine says that Professor Martin Hellman of Stanford, an expert in statistics and probability, believes that nuclear war is inevitable because of the "Markov principle," a concept involved in Russian roulette. According to Hellman, "In Russian roulette... there is one chance in six of getting killed. But that's if you play the game only one time. If you play twice, the two chances of being shot reinforce each other, and the odds are almost one in three of killing yourself. After ten trials, the odds are 84% that you're dead; after 20 trials, 97%. And if you continue to play,the odds become 100% that you will shoot yourself... Yet we keep playing nuclear roulette, pulling the trigger more often than most people realize. Every small war as pulling the trigger. Every threat to use violence is pulling the trigger. Each action in our old-fashioned way of thinking generates another chance of triggering the final global holocaust... I'm convinced the only way to survive nuclear roulette is to stop playing the game, to put down the gun globally, to move beyond war. If we want to avoid the world's imminent suicide, we must shift totally the way we think about war. We no longer can accept it as a

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WELL, IT'S ALL WATER OVER THE NORTH SIDE OF THE TREE, ANYWAY

The left sees North as a symbol of the shattering of Reagan's blue-smoke-mirrors presidency, whose wing-and-a-prayer brand of cowboy diplomacy has finally come home to roost. — **Ben Bradlee Jr., Boston Globe.**

means of settling disputes, as an extension of politics or as an innate ingedient in the nature of man."

'Amerika' protest underway: Peace groups around the country are mobilizing the protest the scheduled February showing of the ABC mini-series 'Amerika.' In the course of the 12-hour series, the Soviets massacre the US Congress and burn the Capitol. American progressives work as agents of the Soviet governent. American women are raped by occupying third-world soldiers. Those who resist the Soviets are herded into concentration camps and brainwashed. Eliott Richardson has characterized the show as "McCarthyesque" and "xenophobic." For information on protest activities contact Bruce Birchard at the National Disarmament Program, AFSC, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia Pa 19102 (215-2417171).

Pentagon major toxic waste producer: The Pentagon is the nation's number one generator of toxic waste, according to the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes. The military produces half a milion tons each year — more than the top five chemical companies combined. So far, the Pentagon has counted more than 4,000 toxic waste sites on nearly 500 military bases around the nation. That is nearly four times more than the number of toxic waste sites on the civilian Superfund list... And in Hanford, Washington, fear is growing among farmers that the government's nuclear facility there has contaminated agricultural products, threatening economic ruin. Studies show, for example, that Hanford let loose over a million curies of the radioactive gas iodine-131 between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s. According to PNS, Washington state's health services has calculated that the releases caused significant exposure to people more than 100 miles away in Spokane, and that people nearby were probably exposed at levels hundreds of times above those considered safe by the medical community. PNS reports that the GAO has found that the Hanford experience is not atypical. For example, at the Savannah River bomb plant in South Carolina, radioactive contamination of nearby creeks is measured at 42,500 times over EPA drinking water standards and a clean-up would cost an estimated $7 billion.

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